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SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN PARLIAMENT, 4/10-4/16: CIVILIAN
CASUALTIES DOMINATE DEBATE

¶1. Outrage against civilian casualty incidents in Khost and Kunar provinces dominated Parliamentary debate and action (or in some cases inaction), stalling most other legislation in Parliament during the week of April 10-16. MPs in both houses tabled work on laws or resolutions concerning private security companies, possible impeachment of the Information Minister for refusing to enforce the media law, and the Supreme Court statement in support of President Karzai remaining in office after the May 22 constitutional expiration of his term. Instead, MPs lashed out against US and Coalition forces for the reported deaths of civilians during operations in Khost and Kunar. Lower House Khost MPs staged a boycott on April 11, stating they would not attend parliamentary sessions until the government negotiated a strategy to limit civilian casualties with Coalition military leaders. Upper House Khost MPs led a one-day walkout on April 12, supported by nearly three-quarters of all parliamentarians, ending the Upper House's session.

¶2. MPs like Mawlawi Ludin (Nangarhar, Pashtun) accused US forces of not respecting international laws. Ludin called for the government to prohibit foreign forces from entering the homes of Afghans or conducting operations without the coordination of Afghan security forces. MP Abdul Jabbar Shulgari (Ghazni, Pashtun) agreed, comparing Coalition operations to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. "Civilians were killed during Russian airstrikes, but even the Russians never entered our homes," he said. Other MPs called for a status of forces agreement and a withdrawal timeline for international forces. Only a few MPs spoke in favor of Coalition forces, pointing out that Taliban and other insurgent groups purposely targeted civilians, whereas Coalition-caused incidents were accidental. Speaker Qanooni, generally a supporter of foreign forces' presence in Afghanistan, ended two of the week's sessions early as MPs' speeches grew more emotional. Qanooni assured MPs that Parliament and the government would strike an agreement with Coalition military leaders to reduce civilian casualty incidents.

¶3. In between civilian casualty debates, Parliament's houses moved some legislation forward. The Lower House passed a law codifying relations between the three branches of government, and began work on a law regulating the national Chamber of Commerce. The Upper House passed a law on the structure of the judicial system. A personal rivalry among female MPs has kept the Lower House Women's Committee leaderless since January, stalling work on a number of bills. This week, Qanooni threatened to fold the committee into the Auditing and Oversight Committee if Women's Committee members did not resolve their differences and elect a chair.

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